

Sermon 22nd November 2015

Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14
Revelation 1.4b-8
John 18.33-37

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Introduction

- A number of years ago, an American soldier was travelling on a bus in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden
- And while travelling along he got into conversation with an English-speaking Swedish man who was sitting next to him
- “America is the most democratic country in the world”, the American soldier declared
- “Ordinary citizens can go to the White House to see the President of the United States and discuss things with him”
- The Swedish man next to him did not seem that surprised but simply sat there and smiled back
- “Well, what do you think of that?” asked the American soldier
- Looking back at the American soldier the Swedish man replied, “Well, that’s nothing. In Sweden, the king and the people travel on the same bus”
- The American soldier looked back incredulously and at the next stop the Swedish man got off
- It was at this point in the journey that the American soldier was told by the other passengers that he had been sitting next to King Gustav Adolf VI of Sweden

Diametric Opposites

- One of the problems with communication and understanding between the Church and the secular world is that they are utterly different
- And they are utterly different because they occupy utterly different locations
- The Church is in the Kingdom of God and the secular world is in the kingdom of...the world
- And these two locations or kingdoms have utterly different values, viewpoints and systems of measurement
- In fact it would be fair to say that they are diametrically opposite – poles apart as it were
- And yet this complete opposition, this mirror image of values, viewpoints and measures should not be too much of a surprise
- After all the kingdom of the world came out of the Kingdom of God; the fallen kingdom of humanity arose from opposition and rejection of God and His values
- But this diametric opposition often means that the Church does not understand the world...
- ...and it certainly means that the world almost always does not understand the Church
- For instance, on this Sunday – Christ the King – when we talk about kingship
- The Church has one view, from the perspective of the kingdom of God, and the world has an entirely different view
- Our gospel reading from John’s Gospel provides all the evidence one would need to illustrate this

- “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king’”
- Jesus and Pilate are using the same word, “king”, but with two completely different understandings

Servant King

- In the film “Schindler’s List” the character of the film title Oskar Schindler has a drunken discussion with the German commandant of a labour camp, Amon Goeth
- And in this discussion they talk about the nature of power, what real power actual is, and the conversation goes like this...
- Goeth: “You know, I look at you. I watch you. You’re not a drunk. That’s, that’s real control. Control is power. That’s power.”
- Schindler: “Is that why they fear us?”
- Goeth: “We have the power to kill, that’s why they fear us.”
- Schindler: “They fear us because we have the power to kill arbitrarily. A man commits a crime, he should know better. We have him killed and we feel pretty good about it. Or we kill him ourselves and we feel even better. That’s not power, though, that’s justice. That’s different than power. Power is when we have every justification to kill – and we don’t.”
- Goeth: “You think that’s power.”
- Schindler: “That’s what the emperors had. A man stole something, he’s brought in before the emperor, he throws himself down on the ground, he begs for mercy, he knows he’s going to die. And the emperor pardons him. This worthless man, he lets him go.”

- Goeth: “I think you are drunk.”
- Schindler: “That’s power, Amon. That is power.”
- And this discussion from the film Schindler’s List is very much like the discussion between Jesus and Pilate
- One of them, Pilate, thinks he holds all the real power, the power over life and death
- Whereas the other, Jesus, who really does hold the power over life and death, knows that is not real power
- Pilate and Jesus have two diametric opposite views as to the nature of real power, true power
- Most people know the verse John 3.16, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*”
- But it is the next verse John 3.17 that holds the key, “*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him*”
- Jesus came into the world not to wag the finger at humanity, not to condemn humanity to death but to extend mercy to humanity
- To give humanity the opportunity to receive forgiveness
- That is the true nature of power, to have every right to condemn and to choose not to
- To choose instead to forgive, to forego the right of recompense, of response, of retaliation
- Our king, Christ the King, is a king who serves his people with forgiveness by taking the punishment onto himself as a sacrificial lamb – we have a servant king, that is the true king

King of Kings

- But as we digest this fact, that our king, Christ the King is a servant king...
- ...so we also need to take stock of our other two readings from the Book of the prophet Daniel and from the prophetic Book of Revelation
- In the Narnia series of books written by C.S. Lewis the character Aslan – a representation of Jesus – is a lion
- But Aslan the lion is approachable and loving towards the children in the books, however, at one point they are warned...
- *“He's wild, you know. Not like a tame lion”*
- Jesus, Christ the King is the Lamb of God but he is also the Lion of Judah – and he is no tame lion
- Both of the prophetic passages describe the same future where Jesus, Christ the King will return
- And Jesus will return as the King of Kings, the Alpha and the Omega, the Ancient One, the firstborn of the dead
- Yes, Jesus is the servant king who as the revelation passage says has, *“freed us from our sins by his blood”*
- But he is also the judge who will bring justice, and for those that do not recognise His kingship and who will not receive His offer of forgiveness...
- ...for them, Jesus will be the truly terrifying king, the lion king, and not like a tame lion
- Jesus, Christ the King is the servant king, but He is also the just king

Conclusions

- The world and the Church will almost always hold diametrically opposite views on most matters of importance
- The world's view of Jesus is that he either didn't exist or that he didn't really matter – he was just a good man
- The Church's view of Jesus is that He has always existed and He is the only thing that really matters – He is God
- But on this Sunday, the Sunday of Christ the King, the Church itself holds two apparently diametric opposite views of Jesus – Jesus is both at the same time the Lion and the Lamb
- And in the Kingdom to come, God's kingdom, the two really will sit down side by side in the person of Jesus
- And this other duality of Jesus – remember Jesus is both fully human and fully God – this other duality of Jesus, Lamb and Lion is good for us
- Because sometimes in our walk with Jesus it will be important to remember he is Lamb of God who forgives us and restores us
- And at other times in our walk with Jesus it will be important to remember he is the Lion of Judah who admonishes us and disciplines us
- Jesus, Christ the King is both at the same time the one that loves you the most...
- ...but is also the one who will discipline you the most to conform to His likeness
- Both merciful and holy, the true King of kings, Christ the King
- Thanks be to God. **Amen.**